

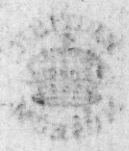
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S E R M O N

ON THE ETERNITY OF

FUTURE PUNISHMENTS.



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S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE

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UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

AT ST. MARY'S,

ON SUNDAY APRIL THE NINTH, MDCCLXXXVI.

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BY ISAAC CROUCH, M. A.

VICE-PRINCIPAL OF ST. EDMUND'S HALL.

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S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

AT ST. MARTIN'S

ON SUNDAY APRIL THE NINTH, MDCCCLXXVI

BY ISAAC TUCKER, M.A.



VICE PRINCIPAL OF ST. EDMUND'S HALL

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MDCCCLXXVI

[I]

REVELATION XXII. II.

He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

THE plain sense of these memorable words is, that, at a certain season, the character and situation of the evil and of the good will be finally and irreversibly fixed; that repentance will be hid from the eyes of the former, and that the latter will be beyond the reach of destruction. Whether this season will be in a future or in the present world hath been differently determined according to the connection of the passage with the preceding or subsequent context. In either view, it furnishes a very firm support to a doctrine, which it is the favourite heresy of the present age to explode, the eternity of future punishment. The design of this discourse is to assert and vindicate that important doctrine. It is not, indeed, to be presumed, that any argument I can produce in it's defence, should prevail with those who have adopted the contrary sentiment, because they are interested in the truth of it: But I would caution others who have no reason, on their own account, to wish that the consequences of sin may be only temporary, how they countenance an opinion so injurious to the cause of piety and virtue. As the progress of this opinion hath rendered it fashionable, and the objections against it, however weighty and formidable, are therefore more easily overlooked, a caution of this kind is not unnecessary.

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It usually happens that the friends of long and well established doctrines omit no opportunity to stand forth in their defence, when they are warmly attacked, and confidently exploded. The disciples of Socinus, the most inveterate enemies of our holy faith, have not generally found us asleep when they have attempted to sow their tares. The poisonous weeds of blasphemy against the Lord Jesus, and contempt of his person and character, have not yet been suffered to overspread the garden of God. With a zeal, and industry, and success, proportioned to so good a cause, the faithful sons of our church have opposed every design to rob the Messiah of His Deity and Priesthood. But the attack upon the purity, and truth, and justice of God—for such, in fact, is the denial of eternal punishment, by the same enemies of the gospel, appears, either to have escaped their vigilance, or to be considered as too formidable for resistance.

This, indeed, hath not always been the case. The doctrine I undertake to defend, on former occasions, hath called forth the most able advocates. The arguments which have been produced in it's behalf—and many of them have been urged within these walls—are too weighty and too apposite to be excluded from the subject. I should hope, they only want to be recollected to regain their influence. Nor will there be any difficulty in adapting them to the modern form of this controversy. They speak plainly and generally to the question. And however the opinion I oppose may have changed it's appearance in the hands of it's various friends, it doth not seem to have acquired any new support. I am bold to affirm, that, by a pious and humble enquirer, unprejudiced by the false wisdom, and uncorrupted by the frivolous delicacy of the age, the doctrine of eternal punishment, in spite of ridicule and invective, will be found to be the express doctrine of revelation—to be perfectly compatible

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patible with the plan of the gospel—and with the attributes—and conduct of God. To lead you to these conclusions, let us consider the subject, and select, and arrange our proofs of it, in this four-fold view.

I. It is the express doctrine of revelation, that the punishment of the wicked, in another world, will endure for ever.

Not only in one, or a few passages, but wherever we have any representation of the torments of hell, and the doom of sinners, the language of the gospel holds out to us ideas of eternity. The sentence pronounced upon the impenitent, at the day of judgment, our Lord hath delivered to us in the following terms; “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”^a “The smoke of their torment,” St. John tells us, “ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image.”^b Such will be “punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”^c It hath been denied, that the expressions of eternity, in these and similar passages, signify a duration strictly and literally eternal, because such expressions must, sometimes, in the Old Testament, be limited to a certain period. But the inference is rash and groundless. If a peculiar sense is to be affixed to eternity, in a few passages, where the subjects themselves are either determinable in their own nature, or have been determined by the providence of God; such as, human servitude, and the ceremonial œconomy; must it always have this peculiar sense, where the subject is not necessarily determinable? It doth not appear, that there is a single passage in the New Testament,

^a Mat. xxv. 41.

^b Rev. xiv. 11.

^c 1 Thess. i. 9.

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where the word *αιωνιος*, or any of it's relatives, absolutely demands a limited interpretation.^a In one instance, at least, where it is applied to the happiness of the righteous, it hath generally been admitted in it's natural signification, of a strict, and proper, and literal eternity. And it is an argument of no small importance, that the duration of blifs, and the duration of torment, are denoted by the same term. The wicked "shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into everlasting life."^e

A bold writer on this subject hath, indeed, without any fear of consequences, very consistently, denied the eternal state of the blessed.^f With him, happiness and misery are situations alike precarious. The next world, as well as this, is probationary; and after we have been exalted unto heaven, there is some danger of being thrust down to hell. But we are not concerned to refute every wild opinion, which hath no warrant from Scripture. And there is other language besides what we have already produced, which denotes the eternity of future misery.

In the 9th chapter of St. Mark, our Saviour describes the punishment of hell, in words strongly expressive of endless duration. It is styled "the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."^g "Our Lord seems here," says a judicious writer,^h "to explain his own meaning of the other phrases which he sometimes uses, upon this subject. If scruples be raised, however unjustly, about the import and extent of the word *αιωνιος*, here nothing depends upon that term: It rather appears, that that term, as applied to this subject, must be understood in it's full extent; since it is here repeated, time after time, that the fire "is unquenchable, and the worm never dies." The very first de-

^a See Dr. Hammond's Judgment worthy of God, Part 2. ^e Mat. xxv. 46. ^f Bp. Newton.

^g V. 43, 44.

^h Dr. Horbery's Scripture Doctrine of future Punishment; in loc. clarification

claration of the fate of the wicked in the New Testament is to the same effect: "He will gather His wheat into the garner," saith the Baptist, "but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."ⁱ It is contrary to the simplicity of the Scriptures, to use such expressions as these without meaning. In what terms besides could they convey the idea of a perpetuity of torments?

Not only in plain declaration, but in parable, doth the Holy Spirit inculcate this doctrine. The rich man is represented, as in vain imploring a drop of water to cool his tongue; as having already received his good things; and as shut out from heaven by an impassable gulf.* Neither annihilation, nor restitution can be fairly inferred from any part of this instructive history. And they are both absolutely excluded from the fate of Judas. "It had been good for that man," says Christ, "if he had not been born."^l Had the punishment of his crime consisted in annihilation only, Judas, having already enjoyed many pleasures in this life, would have been happier to have existed, than not to have existed: And if, after the longest determinate period of misery, he should be admitted to eternal glory, the sum of his pleasures would infinitely exceed his sufferings. Contrary to our Lord's declaration, it would be good for that man to be born, who would, some time or other, be happy for ever.^m

Exclusion from the kingdom of God is a denunciation very frequent in Scripture. And it is conceived in such terms as leave no room to suppose that it will be only for a season. "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ου μη εισελθητε, ye shall, *in no case*, enter into the kingdom of heaven."ⁿ *Kai ου μη εισελθη*, the same double negative, "and there shall *in no wise* enter any thing that defileth, neither

ⁱ Mat. iii. 12. * Luke xvi. ^l Mat. xxvi. 24. ^m See M. Saurin's Serm. on Rev. xiv. 11. and Seed's Serm. in loc. Vol. 2. ⁿ Mat. v. 20.

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“ whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.”^o St. Paul, as though aware of the attempts which would be made to soften the severity of such threatnings, generally prefaces them with a caution against delusion. “ Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idol-
“ aters, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”^p But surely, the Apostle hath himself deceived us, if, notwithstanding such language, we ought to believe, that the characters here specified, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

The gospel is designed, not merely, nor principally, for the study of scholars and critics, but for the salvation of the poorest and plainest Christian. To such, if any part of this gospel ought, at first sight, to be intelligible, it surely should be its sanctions. In another controversy, it hath very properly been urged, that a man, unacquainted with Christianity, and beginning to read the Bible, with a pure intention of knowing its obvious testimony, could not fail to find the important doctrines of the divinity and sacrifice of the Son of God. The same may be said with regard to the present question. The plain reader, who wishes to learn, not to amend, the revelations of God, could have no other idea of the punishment of impenitent sinners, than that it would endure for ever. Tell him that such an opinion is unscriptural, and he would despair of gaining any instruction from a book, whose sense and language were so widely different. For we proceed to shew

II. That the doctrine of eternal punishment, besides being expressly asserted, is perfectly consistent with the plan of the gospel.

It is the design of the word of God to call us to immediate repentance and salvation. In order to this, it instructs us in the nature and effects of sin. It teaches us that the present life is the only

^o Rev. xxi. 27.

^p 1 Cor. vi. 9. Gal. vi. 7.

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state of trial—and that the succeeding state of things will be that of retribution, “a revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

Sin is uniformly represented by the sacred writers, in the most dreadful light. It is an act of rebellion against the supreme Majesty of heaven and earth. It is the transgression of a law holy, and just, and good; the penalty of which is the curse of Almighty God. It defiles the conscience. It renders a man abominable in the divine presence. A single act of disobedience hath disordered the whole creation. It hath been the source of all the suffering and sorrow in the world. It hath involved in death all the posterity of Adam, even that part of it “which had not sinned after the similitude of his transgression.”^a The evil of sin is infinite. I do not say, because it is committed against an infinite Being, though I am far from convinced that this reason is insufficient.—I would rather say, because it hath in it an infinite deformity, as the violation of infinite obligation. But I do not contend for either of these representations, because, I know not, that they are to be found in the word of God. Still, however, the guilt of sin is infinite; because it excluded angels from heaven, and men from paradise, and consigned them, unless mercy should intervene, to eternal misery.^b Especially because it required, and received, for its expiation, in behalf of penitent man, a sacrifice of infinite dignity. God hath “made the “soul” of his only begotten Son “an offering for sin.”^c

Associated with these discoveries and representations, the eternity of future punishments is no matter of surprize. If the demerit of sin be so great, as to require an infinite atonement, can the wilful rejection of this atonement be followed by any thing short of infinite misery? To the impenitent and unbelieving, the death of

^a Rom. v. 14.

^b Restitutionists, I believe, generally hold that the salvation of the damned is to be ascribed to the goodness of God.

^c Is. liii. 10.

Christ

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Christ is of no other consequence than to aggravate their guilt; and to guilt thus aggravated what other punishment can consistently be attached, than the vengeance of eternal fire? Can we imagine too sore an infliction for him, who "hath trodden under foot the " son of God—and accounted the blood of the covenant an unholy " thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace."* If, with the Socinians, we esteem the law of God as of small account, and annihilate the turpitude of sin, it will be very natural to endeavour to mitigate the terrors of hell. But if, with Jesus Christ, we consider the law as perfect, and pure, and unchangeable; and, with his apostle, consider sin as exceeding sinful, there will be no difficulty in conceiving, that they who know not God, and obey not the gospel, will be punished with everlasting destruction.

We are taught in Scripture, that the only state of probation is this present life. Whatever may be the import of two passages in the book of Ecclesiastes, which are frequently produced on this subject, that "where the tree falleth, there it shall be,"^u and that "there is no work, nor device, nor knowlege, nor wisdom in the "grave"^w—it is the loud voice of revelation, that we must all stand at the tribunal of Jesus Christ, to give an account, and to receive the recompense, of the things done in the body. Many of our Lord's discourses, and particularly, the parable of the talents, of the tares of the field, and the marriage supper, fully and strongly declare this truth: And the duties of watchfulness, and immediate attention to the calls of the gospel, are inferred from it. The means of grace and the opportunities of salvation, will last no longer than the present period. If they have been unimproved and neglected, and unconquerable habits of sin have been formed in the soul, the

* Heb. x. 29.

^u Eccles. xi. 3.

^w Ibid. ix. 10.

talents with which a man was entrusted, will then be taken away from him. He will be considered and treated as incorrigibly wicked. He will be bound hand and foot. All the practical powers of his soul will be judicially disabled, and he will be banished from the presence of God. From this situation there is no redemption. After the judgment of the great day in which this sentence will be inflicted, the end cometh. Jesus Christ, "having accomplished
 " the number of His elect, delivers up the kingdom to God even
 " the Father: And as no man can, nor from the foundation of the
 " world to the end of it, ever did, come to the Father but by
 " Him;—and His offices of mediation are now at an end—and the
 " purpose of God by Him of bringing many sons unto glory are
 " fulfilled; the mystery, or the whole mysterious dispensation of
 " God in Christ succeeds. He, and His saints take possession of the
 " everlasting kingdom, and the door is shut."^{*} "How shall we
 " escape," saith the Apostle, "if we neglect this great salvation?"[†]
 Sinners, however, will, after all this, escape. The above representation, though founded in the Scripture, is false, if the torments of hell are, one day, to cease for ever. Who doth not see that, to admit this opinion is to re-model the gospel,—to tear up the foundation of all religion, by rejecting the notion of a probationary state, and expecting, in the other world, as well as in this, one event unto the righteous and to the wicked?

It is in strict consistence with confining the period of trial to this life, and with the final doom of the ungodly, that the Scripture allows no regards for them from surviving Christians. All our endeavours for their conversion are to be exerted while they are present with us. We are no where directed to intercede in their be-

^{*} See Dr. Horbery's Sermon on Mat. xxv. 28, et seq.

[†] Heb. ii. 3.

half, when the present day of salvation is elapsed. Restitutionists, in the blind zeal of their benevolence, have sometimes been so sensible of the weight of this negative argument, that they have added to the Popish doctrine of purgatory that of prayers for the dead. Among Protestants, who, like their fathers, adhere scrupulously to the Bible, this doctrine will not easily be admitted. The torments of hell are there spoken of, not as curative or expiatory, but as penal. "What is the hope of the hypocrite, when God taketh away his soul?"² The expectation of a release from them, would infinitely alleviate the pains of hell. "For the inexpressible increase of the misery of the damned," says a fine writer "is, that to each of their sorrows they join the weight of eternity."³ "In the furnace of fire there is weeping and gnashing of teeth,"⁴ extreme anguish and extreme fury. What alteration have torments made in the devils? Do we not conceive of hell, the place of their habitation, as a place of the most horrid impiety? Are not the worshippers of the beast, in consequence of the divine vengeance, represented as "blaspheming the God of heaven, and not repenting of their deeds?"⁵ How can it be reconciled with the ideas we acquire from Scripture, "that a place farthest removed from God and His heavenly influences, inhabited only by His most accursed enemies, should prove the most effectual school of virtue?"⁶ Men may construct hypotheses and form their metaphysical deductions into a rule for the judgments of God. They may limit the ends of punishment as they please. But they are only displaying their ignorance and their presumption. It becomes us to be satisfied with the plain system contained in the gospel; and we should alter *our* laws for the regulation of the divine govern-

² Job. xxvii. 8.

³ Rev. xvi. 11.

⁴ M. Nicole Port Royal Essays, Vol. IV.

⁵ Dr. Horbery's Scrip. Doct. Ch. 5.

⁶ Mat. viii. 12.

ment, till they correspond with the discoveries of divine truth.^a We know that the judgments of God, which are now unsearchable, will, one day, approve themselves to the world. Every mouth will then be stopped, not by violence, but by conviction; and we shall say, with the angel, "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because Thou hast judged thus."^f—In the mean time, let us enquire, how far our ideas on this subject may interest us in the advice of the Prophet, "Wherefore hear the word of the Lord. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement: when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation:—Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet—And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand.—For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it, and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it. For the Lord shall rise up, as in mount Perazim, He shall be wroth, as in the valley of Gibeon, that He may do His work, His strange work, and bring to pass His act, His strange act. Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong."^g At least, we should do well to consider, whether we have any authority to admit and assert an opinion, so contrary to the whole scheme of revelation, as that we are now opposing. Even "if

^a Οὐκ εἶδὼς ἱκανῶς πρὶν τῶν ἐν ἀδύ, says a wise heathen, οὐκ οἶμαι ἔκ μὲν τὰ δι' ἀδίκην, καὶ τὸ ἀπιδεῖν τὰ βέλτερον καὶ θῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων, οὐκ οἶμαι καὶ ἀνθρώπων εἶναι, εἶδεν.

Platonis Apol. Soc. §. 17.

^f Rev. xvi. 5.

^g If. xviii. 14 et seq.

“ it were allowed that God had no other design in denouncing eter-
 “ nal punishments, than that of alarming sinners, would it become
 “ us to oppose His wise purpose, and, with our unhallowed hands,
 “ to throw down the batteries which He hath erected against sin?
 “ Shall we pretend to penetrate into His mysterious views, or ha-
 “ ving, as it were, extorted His confidence, shall we be so indis-
 “ creet as to publish it? Let us not be wise above that which is
 “ written. Let us preach the gospel as God hath revealed it. God
 “ did not think the doctrine of everlasting punishments injurious to
 “ the holiness of His attributes: Let us not pretend to think it will
 “ injure them.”^b The doctrine of restitution can only be calculated
 for another state of being. It ought not to be taught in this world.
 In the Old Testament there is an alarming caution to the Prophets;
 —and, as the spirit and import of it is not contrary to the gospel,
 it calls also for our serious attention. “ The Prophet which shall
 “ presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not com-
 “ manded him to speak, even that prophet shall die.”ⁱ

III. The rejection of eternal misery from the Christian system is
 not, because that opinion hath no place in the Bible, but because it
 is conceived to be unfriendly to the divine perfections. It is our
 next business to shew that it is not unfriendly to them.

I. In the doctrine of eternal punishment there is nothing contrary
 to the power of God. It hath indeed been confidently asserted that
 it is impossible for any creature to live in eternal torments: And the
 language of the wicked in Isaiah, “ Who among us shall dwell with
 “ everlasting burnings?”^k for want of better proof, hath been
 alledged in support of it. But is it modest to deny, that the same
 “ mighty God can establish sinners for correction”^l who once pre-

^a Saurin's Serm. u. f.

ⁱ Deut. xviii. 20.

^k Ch. xxxiii. 14.

^l Habak. i. 12.

served His servants in the flame of a fiery furnace? May not the wicked, like the bush on mount Horeb, which, though burning, was not consumed, by a supernatural provision, be made to exist for ever, in hell?

2. But, though men are willing to limit the divine power, they are very jealous of the divine liberty, which is represented as infringed, unless God hath a right of revoking or executing the sentences of His judgment. Not to say, that it is too late to argue from the liberty of a perfect Being, when His purpose is declared,—and that this attribute must be considered as in concert with His unchangeableness and His veracity, — this argument, if pursued, would lead us to deny the probability of any punishment. If God be free to reduce the sufferings of eternity to the sufferings of a thousand years, He is equally free to reduce them to the sufferings of an hour, or altogether to abolish them. The latter would be most consistent with the modern fond notions of tenderness and philanthropy. To the moral perfections of God, however, and not to His power and liberty, the cause we espouse is considered as most injurious.

3. To the veracity of God, indeed, it is evidently most friendly. Of this perfection the partizans of the contrary opinion are the violators. Analogical reasoning from man to God hath never been more unworthily and unhappily employed, than here. Because impetuous and ignorant beings may find it necessary to omit the execution of their threatnings, or, as it is gently expressed, may be better than their word, such a conduct hath been considered as no impeachment of the divine faithfulness. It is a sufficient answer to this representation that “the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for

“for He is not a man that He should repent.”^a To say that God may be better than His word, is saying, neither more nor less, than, that His word is not true. And to expect any thing from Jesus Christ, which is not contained in His covenant, is, in fact, to renounce the gospel.

4. The purity of God is another attribute which the assertors of eternal misery will be allowed to defend.

The Holy Spirit suggests to us the most striking conceptions of the purity of Jehovah. In his sight the heavens are not clean.^b But familiar with the practice of sin, and under the imperceptible influence of infidelity, we debase, in our ideas, this glorious attribute, and forget that sin is utterly abominable and accursed before God. When Isaiah felt the impression of the divine purity, as celebrated by the Seraphim, how hateful did he appear in his own eyes?^c Nay, such is the holiness of the King of Saints, that He doth not spare the minute offences of His servants. Though their sins are pardoned by the blood of the everlasting covenant, yet, as in the case of David, they must experience the bitter effects of them. “The tribulations they endure are a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God”^d and His hatred of sin. In His moral government of the world, He doth not interpose to prevent certain natural consequences, which He hath annexed to the violations of His law. “Judgment,” says St. Peter, “begins at the house of God, and if it first begin with us, what shall the end be of them who obey not the gospel of God?”^e “And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” How can God look with any degree of favour upon those who have died, and who are unalterably fixed, in habits of sin? Now this is the case of all

^a 1 Sam. xv. 29. ^b Job. xv. 15. ^c Is. vi. 5. ^d 1 Thes. i. 4, 5. ^e 1 Tit. iv. 17, 18.
the

the inhabitants of hell. They have contracted a moral incapacity of amendment; and in consequence of their own obstinate depravity, which would never submit to the proffered grace of the gospel, they will continue for ever the enemies of God, subject to those sinful qualities and dispositions which they have formed here, and which are directly opposite to the perfection and holiness of the divine nature. Such views as these of the purity of God, must be subservient to our ideas of eternal misery: And such views also as these of the situation of the lost, will tend to vindicate His goodness and His justice.

5. Of the attribute of divine goodness, it hath been thought sufficient to say, that it is not, as in man, a virtue of constitution, but an independent perfection, consistent with infinite wisdom, and truth, and equity. It may, moreover, be reconciled with eternal punishment, if we consider, that hell is the portion of those only who have despised the riches of God's goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering. Not in remitting the punishment of the impenitent, but "in this was manifested the love of God towards us, "because God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting "life." And in order that they may thus believe and be saved, God graciously sets before them death and life, the terrors of the law, and the promises of the gospel. The means of grace are put into their hands, and the Holy Spirit is striving with their hearts. They are solicited, in the most affectionate manner, to embrace life, and assured that God willeth not their death, and that there will be joy in heaven on their conversion. Can it be an impeachment of the divine goodness, if they who thus perish in spite of it,

John iv. 9. iii. 16.

be

be given over to the consequences of their obstinacy,—if they have judgment without mercy, who have abused the season, and deliberately despised the offer of mercy?

In an age in which benevolence is the fashionable, and the only virtue,—in which we hear so much of the feelings of the heart, and the refinements of delicacy, and so little of the fear of God, and a regard to His glory, men will very plausibly harrangue on the inconsistency of eternal punishment with infinite goodness. But this is to address the passions and prejudices and corrupt taste of the world. It is to argue from the partial views of men. It is to forget, that God is the Governor of the universe—that He consults the good of the whole system—that He acts by unchangeable laws,—that it is unreasonable to expect any alteration of His laws in favour of those, who had fair warning given them by God Himself, but who would never submit to the measures of His providence, nor believe the declarations of His will.* It is to forget, also, what hath very ably been urged upon the subject “that there is a pre-
“ous obligation upon every one who cometh into the world, either
“to do those duties, or submit to those penalties, which preserve or
“promote the general happiness, and that no evil is suffered to con-
“tinue in the creation, but to prevent or avoid a greater.”†

6. With regard to the justice of God on this point, there have been many objections. There have been also as many replies, and such as should, at least, silence objections—Unless we knew more than we can possibly know in this world, of the nature of sin, and the moral government of God, the argument drawn from the supposed disproportion between offences committed in time, and torments inflicted for ever, can have little weight. With our limited ideas, it

* Horbery's Serm. xii.

† Seed's Serm. v. f.

is impossible to state accurately the proportion between guilt and punishment. If the length of time employed in committing sin were the measure of its punishment, a life of sixty years disobedience would only be succeeded by sixty years torments. Nay, the wicked are punished in this world; and we often say, in pressing holiness upon men, that the penal evils which naturally follow sin here, are greater than its pleasures. Upon the idea of proportion then, God is unrighteous who taketh vengeance in another world. The shortest period of future misery is as indefensible as the longest. "He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." But we must know all the consequences and tendencies of sin, as it is opposite to the greatest good, as it increaseth the general corruption, and as it disorders the government of God, before we can estimate its guilt. It is in this view that we defend the conduct of human legislators in punishing crimes, small in themselves, with death. "And shall mortal man be more just than God?" Besides, men punish with death while there is a possibility of a criminals repenting, but we may safely affirm, that God never punisheth till His grace hath been finally rejected, and men have sold themselves to work wickedness, beyond any possibility of redemption.

In these circumstances, what can be expected but that God's "anger should be accomplished, and His fury rest upon them?" He who seeth from everlasting to everlasting, and calleth the things which are not as though they were, knoweth that the disposition of habitual offenders would never lead them from death unto life.* When

* Luk. xvi. 10.

† Ezek. v. 13.

* — Patitur pœnas peccandi sola voluntas;
Nam scelus intra se tacitum qui cogitat, ullum,
Facti crimen habet—

Juv.

men have been long accustomed to do evil, even with the means of grace in their power, their recovery is desperate. Of this the antediluvian world is an instance. From one century to another, God had given them space to repent of their abominations, and they repented not. Thus it is with all impenitent sinners, and where is the injustice of their punishment? Is God bound to alter the constitution of His dispensations, to make men happy against their will, and against their nature? As to their repentance in hell without the means of grace, it is impossible, and we have no warrant to expect, that such means will be afforded them. The wrath of God will, indeed, cause them exceedingly to fear and quake. They will be covered with remorse and confusion. But where are the dispositions of love and obedience? Without these, they would harden again, like metal taken from the furnace, should a period be assigned to their sufferings. I promised lastly, to remark

IV. The consistency of our doctrine with the conduct of God.

The speculations of men yield less reluctantly to facts than to reasonings. Now it is a fact incontrovertible in the conversion of sinners, that, when they begin to consider their ways, and God lets loose His terrors, they are sensible of the abominable turpitude and malignity of sin, and acquit that justice which denounces eternal punishment. As repentance, of which this idea is an inseparable character, is the work of the spirit of truth, I have always considered this fact as decisive upon the subject. Such a persuasion, in such circumstances, cannot but proceed from Him that calleth us. Now if this be the case in the present world, when a man is but just awakened from the dream of sin, and can only recollect a few of his unnumbered transgressions, how will it be with the criminal in that state, when, his understanding being immensely extended, the
soul

soul will comprehend, at one view, all her accumulated guilt, all her secret, and all her presumptuous sins?

The justice of God in punishing impenitent sinners with everlasting misery hath been rashly and presumptuously arraigned. But is it repugnant to His conduct in the pardon and salvation of the penitent, by Jesus Christ? Doth not the substitution of an innocent person for the guilty equally militate against our imperfect notions of equity, as the infliction of an eternal penalty for a temporary transgression? Till we can fully account for the former of these doctrines, let us not be offended at the latter. At least, let us be persuaded, that "the just Lord is in the midst of us, and that He will not do iniquity." He is the rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity: "just and right is He." "He will be justified in His sayings, and will overcome when He is judged."

The eloquent Saurin, in his discourse on this subject, which is well worthy your attention, and to which I refer you for an excellent application of it, hath been happy in illustrating the doctrine before us. "Suppose" says he "two Philosophers existing before the creation, and conversing together on the plan of the world which God was about to create. Suppose the first of these Philosophers affirming, God is going to create intelligent creatures, He could communicate such a degree of knowledge to them as would necessarily conduct them to supreme happiness; but He intends to give them a reason which may be abused, and which will lead them from ignorance to vice, and from vice to misery. Suppose the first of our Philosophers to maintain these positions: Would not the second have reasoned against the plan? It is impossible, he would say, that a Being, full of goodness, should

¹ Zeph. iii. 5.

² Deut. xxxii. 4.

³ Rom. iii. 4.

"create

“ create men, whose existence would be fatal to their felicity. It is
 “ impossible that a Being, supremely holy, should suffer sin to enter
 “ the world. Yet, however plausible the reasons of this Philosopher
 “ might then have appeared, the event hath since justified the truth
 “ of the first plan.—It is certain that God hath created the world
 “ on the plan of the first, and it is also as certain that this world
 “ hath nothing incompatible with the perfections of God, though
 “ we may find it difficult to answer objections.”

“ You cannot comprehend how a just and merciful God can
 “ punish finite sins with infinite pain. But remember the attributes
 “ of God are infinite, and your knowledge is finite. Remember the
 “ two Philosophers disputing on the plan of the world. Remem-
 “ ber the event hath condemned the difficulties of the last, and
 “ justified the plan of the first. Now the revelation of future pu-
 “ nishments in our system is equal to event in that of the first Phi-
 “ losopher. They are revealed. You think future punishments in-
 “ consistent with the attributes of God, but your notions of incon-
 “ sistency ought to vanish at the appearance of scripture light.”^b

Witnesses, as we all are, of the grace and mercy of the Lord
 Jehovah, we have reason to confide in His justice. Yet, at the
 same time, let us not renounce His word. There can be no ad-
 vantage in denying a doctrine in defence of which so much may be
 urged from the revelation and conduct of God, to say nothing of
 the reason of man.—What opinion shall we embrace in it's room?
 Annihilation—restitution—the uncertainty of eternal happiness—
 continual vicissitudes of the pleasures of heaven and the pains of
 purgatory,—are some of the many systems which are offered to us
 instead of the general doctrine of the Christian Church.^c Amidst

^b Vide u. f.

^c It is well known that Origen first conceived the opinion of non-eternity, for which he
 hath

all this variety what shall determine our choice? From so much error who shall select the truth? But the denial of eternal misery is injurious to interests, of which we should be particularly jealous—the interests of morality and religion. “Never did sin sleep—upon so soft a pillow,” said a Divine of the first eminence “as is—made up of this hypothesis.”^d Is an age of undaunted licentiousness the season for mitigating the terrors of God, and correcting the sanctions of His law? Is this a time to flatter impiety, to strengthen the bands of impenitence, and to speak peace to the wicked?

We do not deny, that any system of the limited duration of misery tends to accommodate revelation to the taste of Socinians and unbelievers. But we should be ashamed of such an advantage as this. It is, surely, not right to compliment the adversaries of the gospel with every article of our faith which they are pleased to represent as cruel. Doth such a conduct strike at the root of their prejudices? Doth it not rather confirm them? Our Lord never retracted His hard sayings because the Jews were offended at them.

hath been much censured through all subsequent periods of the Church. At the beginning of the Reformation it was adopted by some of the Anabaptists in Germany. Hence, in King Edward's Articles, which were drawn up in the year 1552, it was expressly condemned in the following terms

ARTIC. XLII.

NON OMNES TANDEM SERVANDI.

Hi quoque damnatione digni sunt, qui conantur hodie perniciosam opinionem instaurare, quod omnes, quantumvis impii, servandi sunt tandem, cum definito tempore a justitiâ divinâ poenas de admissis flagitiis luerunt.

The opinion here censured, not having been taken up in this Kingdom, and the Article thus becoming superfluous, it was, with several others, omitted, at the final establishment of the Church under Queen Elizabeth.

In the next Century, when nothing was too absurd either in government or religion, to want patronage, the doctrine of Origen, among a thousand wild and monstrous extravagancies, was first introduced and received here. It formed part of the unintelligible creed of Sir Henry Vane, and was taught in the Court and family of Oliver Cromwell, by one of his Chaplains.

^d Dean Young's 2 Serm. on the wisdom of believing.

As

As to the present question, will any Deist admit the justice of those criticisms which expunge our doctrine from the Bible? Nay, infidelity itself, hath, at least in one instance, been less hardy than Socinianism—"I do not determine absolutely on this subject," says the Author of *Æmilius*, "O righteous and merciful Being, what ever be thy decrees, I acknowledge thy rectitude. If thou punishest the wicked, my weak reason is dumb before thy justice."

To defend, as well as to acknowledge, the rectitude of God, which hath been the business of this discourse, is to incur the imputation of uncharitableness and barbarity. We may be accused of assuming the functions of devils, and rejoicing in the destruction of our fellow creatures. But, though the opinions of those who thus censure us, cannot, consistently with our views of the Scriptures, obtain our belief, yet we can sincerely reply in the language of Jeremiah, "Amen. The Lord do so. The Lord perform the words which you have spoken, to bring again the vessels of wrath and all that is carried away captive by the hand of hell." ^f This, however, is not the ministry we have received of the Lord Jesus. We must declare to sinners another testimony. Should this testimony, at last, be even found to be false, those who have believed it, and, by this belief, have been stirred up to flee from the wrath to come, can have sustained no injury from the deception. On the other hand, should it be true, those who have been so unhappy as to reject it, and, under the natural influence of the opinion, have restrained fear before God, and bidden defiance to His judgments, will be overwhelmed with everlasting confusion. If we are the ministers of Jesus Christ, whose duty it is to persuade men by the terrors of the Lord, the belief or denial of the doctrine we have been

^e *Æmilius*, Vol. 3.

^f Jerem. xxviii. 6.

establiſhing, will, I conceive, affect us. The patrons of the reſtitution ſyſtem, in general, agree, that the ſyſtem is not to be preached to ſinners. They ſtill conſider it their duty to call men to repentance, by declaring in the terms of Scripture, the ſanction of eternal puniſhment. But it is not probable that they can be as zealouſly and affectionately concerned as others to pluck the wicked like brands from the burning. The opinion they have adopted will imperceptibly influence and correct their addreſſes. In fact, if we are true Chriſtians, walking before God in the obedience of faith, we are not, as individuals, at all intereſted in the queſtion. For us, Jeſus Chriſt hath led captivity captive. He hath broken in pieces the gates of braſs, and burſt in ſunder the bars of iron. And why ſhould we be ſolicitous to plead the cauſe of His enemies, eſpecially in ſuch a manner as can never profit them? If we are not the diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt, having neglected His great ſalvation, we have every reaſon to diſtruſt an opinion ſo congenial to the deſires and intereſts of our depraved nature. In theſe, particularly, and indeed, in all other circumſtances, it will be worth while to remember the fate of the unprofitable ſervant in the parable. While he looked upon God as a hard Maſter, and his heart was ſecretly objecting againſt His judgments as incompatible with His attributes, he was loſing the opportunity of improving his talent, and, at laſt, was convicted and condemned upon his own principles.

May we all be enabled, by the grace of God, ſo to receive, and ſo to declare His word, that, at the great day of Jeſus Chriſt, we may be found faithful to the truſt committed to us, and individually receive that happieſt and moſt honourable of all plaudits. “Well done good and faithful ſervant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

§ Mat. xxv. 21.

F I N I S.

